Archives for the 21st Century in action: refreshed 2012-15
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Foreword

Archives are a vital part of our cultural heritage. They help people, communities and nations make sense of the present and discover a shared sense of the past. They are evidence of events and decisions, of past lives, ideas and communications, and of people’s own identities. Primary archival research is important not only to the historical, social and economic study with which it is most closely associated, but also to scholarship as diverse as climatology, ethnography and linguistics. Archives can provide context in a world that constantly changes, and ground us in the sometimes surprising continuity of our lives.

Together we can protect and develop this rich resource in the best possible way by keeping to five basic principles: that excellence thrives and is celebrated in the sector; that people of all ages and backgrounds can benefit from and are inspired by archives, both on site and online; that services are secure, sustainable, resilient and innovative; that the workforce is diverse, highly skilled and has strong leaders; and that services work collaboratively as an effective national network of provision.

There are tough times ahead, particularly with regard to funding in the public sector. But it is fair to say that anyone who has used an archive to bring meaning – to their family, their research, to their community – becomes a supporter. So, this document takes a fresh look at how, even in a challenging economic climate, those who care about our archival heritage can continue to help their communities get more out of their archives. I believe we can all act as an advocate for our valuable national network of archives which really does improve and enrich lives, every day.

Oliver Morley
Chief Executive and Keeper,
Historical Manuscripts Commissioner,
The National Archives
Introduction

Our archives are unique. Only they can:

- Connect us to our nation and local community, help us understand why we are how we are, and explore our personal identity through the events and changes of the past
- Allow us to hold government to account, with transparent and accessible public information
- Help both public and private organisations make better decisions with all the relevant evidence to learn from their successes – and their mistakes
- Unlock and exploit the economic potential of archived information to the business community
- Release the value of the nation’s documentary heritage, supporting the UK’s internationally significant research and its intellectual and economic benefits
- Bring history to life for children and students, in the way that only archives can – by providing direct access to our written, recorded and visual heritage
- Inspire everyone to get involved in public life and their local community through the creative use of archive material, support all generations in active citizenship and civil society
- Offer communities a range of volunteering opportunities, enriching lives and benefiting archives alike

This document builds on the government policy for archives, Archives for the 21st Century 2009, and its original action plan Archives for the 21st Century: In Action (2010). Since these were published, the landscape in which the archive sector operates in England has become simpler.

The National Archives has taken on the sector leadership and development role from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and the government has made a renewed commitment to greater local responsibility and decision-making. For publicly funded archive services, many are experiencing new governance structures and fewer resources, a result of difficult choices in public funding. For all archives, developments in technologies and user expectations mean that delivering the same services in the same way as in the past is not an option.

A positive response to these changes can be seen in the resourceful approaches of many archives, leading to a number of innovative and radical initiatives. Archives for the 21st Century In Action: Refreshed is a showcase for this radical new work and a call to action for archives to develop these opportunities and to put archives at the heart of the individual, community and nation as a vital asset and invaluable resource.

1 For the Wales version, see www.wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibrariessymal/archives. In Wales, The National Archives works alongside the Welsh Government’s CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales division to support the Welsh archive sector in addressing the priorities set out in the Wales version of Archives for the 21st Century.
Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector.

— First recommendation, Archives for the 21st Century

Archives can be sustained only by being flexible and innovative in response to challenges dictated by the economic climate. The strongest organisations in the archive sector will continually adapt to the changing policy and funding landscape through partnerships and collaboration. Sustainability can be achieved in the sector through working together, building collaborative partnerships to open up opportunities and share resources effectively.

Successful archives are those that can be relevant to those who need, value and use them, and continuously reach out to new audiences. University archives can demonstrate how their collection policy strengthens and supports the research interests of the parent body. Local authority archives services can show their parent body how they are a cost-effective way of contributing to key educational, social and cultural policy objectives.

This can only happen through sustained investment in archives. Despite many public bodies dealing with cuts to their budgets of between 25 and 40%, capital projects are taking place across the sector, bringing new facilities and improved infrastructure to services. There continue to be opportunities for archive services to identify new sources of income streams, work with new partners and engage new audiences.

The National Archives and the sector have been working together to develop an archives service accreditation scheme; to explore alternative models of service provision; to bring over £15 million in investment through identifying funding opportunities; to incorporate archives’ contribution to policy at all levels of government; and to promote innovative practice through the ‘Archives Pace Setter’ programme.
Built to last: over the next three years

The National Archives will...

• Identify and adopt innovative new models of service delivery

• Ensure archives are firmly positioned as a core part of the cultural sector

• Build networks of archives’ practitioners

• Use tools to enhance the knowledge base of the sector

• Recognise, celebrate and support all parts of the sector including family and institutional, business, religious and university archives

• Plan for the transition to the 20-year rule

• Identify new and sustainable funding streams for the sector

• Use the archives service accreditation scheme to demonstrate our effectiveness and value, and advocate effectively for investment.

And archives should...

• Use philanthropic contributions and commissioning approaches to build a diverse and sustainable funding base and revenue stream

• Apply for the archives service accreditation scheme when it becomes available

• Promote their services to governing bodies, funders and partners to ensure their investment in, and commitment to, archives now and in the future.

Key partners

Arts Council England
Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association
Heritage Lottery Fund
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Arts and Humanities Research Council
Local Government Association
Archives and Records Association
Archives+ will give Mancunians and our visitors from around the world the chance to develop a fuller and richer understanding of the phenomenon that is Manchester and the people who have helped to shape its destiny over the centuries.

— Councillor Rosa Battle, Executive member for culture and leisure

**Built to last: Collaboration for improvement and sustainability**

Manchester City Council is planning to relocate the Greater Manchester County Record Office to Central Library, as part of an archive partnership called Archives+. This includes working in partnership with the City Archives and Local Studies, North West Film Archive (Manchester Metropolitan University), BFI Mediatheque, Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre (The University of Manchester), Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society and others.

Archives+ will raise awareness of and provide easy access to Manchester’s histories for the broadest possible audiences. The project will make archives more accessible by creating exciting interpretive exhibition spaces to provide new ways for more people to discover the richness and relevance of archives, share their own stories and have a personalised experience of the City Region’s history. A new learning programme will help people learn about and enjoy the collections.
Effective, skilled workforce

To ensure they remain relevant, archives need the skills to engage and enhance their communities and dynamic leaders to create vibrant outward looking services. As archives explore new service and governance models, opportunities for imaginative and entrepreneurial leadership will attract and retain high-calibre professionals.

The make-up of the workforce should be more representative of wider society, and the cost of obtaining pre-course experience not prohibitive. Developing the right partnerships, and investing in the existing workforce, will provide staff with the relevant skills and breadth of experience to build capacity. Bringing in new skills and perspectives in areas such as digital records, education, advocacy, records management, project management and strategic planning will reinvigorate archives and ensure they are well-placed to build sustainability to develop and improve.

The archive sector has a strong tradition of working with volunteers. The best organisations are exploring how to work effectively with them to help support the professional workforce while delivering maximum benefits to volunteers. Staff time and commitment is key to working successfully with volunteers.

Strengthened leadership and a responsive skilled workforce

— Second recommendation, Archives for the 21st Century

The National Archives and the sector have been working together to secure funding for and deliver the ‘Opening Up Archives’ traineeship programme; to extend leadership through the Clore leadership scheme and national cultural forum programmes; and to define good practice in working with volunteers through the Volunteering in Archives Action Plan.
Effective, skilled workforce: over the next three years

The National Archives will...

• Demonstrate good practice by investing in its staff and volunteers

• Continue to run 'Opening Up Archives' for a further two years

• Review the skills need of the sector

• Provide two bursaries for two years to sponsor postgraduate students through courses related to archives

• Continue to address the skills and understanding required by the sector, developing practical approaches aimed at diversifying the workforce

• Support services in attracting, developing, retaining and working with volunteers.

And archives should...

• Help to remove barriers to those with non-traditional backgrounds and qualifications, using lessons from 'Opening Up Archives'

• Explore partnership-working opportunities to develop training initiatives

• Pilot the new archives’ continuing professional development framework

• Ensure that archives and records management courses address the skills required and monitor the impact of changes in university funding, and increases in student fees

• Invest in leaders to support those going on to lead wider cultural or academic services

• Continue to facilitate self-improvement, peer support and share best practice through partner networks.

Key partners

Archives and Records Association
Arts Council England
Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association
Heritage Lottery Fund
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Arts and Humanities Research Council
Local Government Association
This project provides many opportunities for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to learn about and explore the world of archives. What’s also brilliant is that it ensures trainees can look forward to finding out about the important work that goes into preserving heritage, and they get to be trained on all the different ways of sharing our history with the wider community.

— Katarzyna McCabe, Opening Up Archives, 2012 trainee

case study

Effective skilled workforce: Opening Up Archives

‘Opening Up Archives’, a traineeship scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of its ‘Skills for the Future’ programme, is bringing trainees into the sector from diverse backgrounds who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to work in an archive or record office.

The trainees bring useful skills including teaching, science, information technology and the arts, and provide an opportunity for those who have not followed the traditional route into the sector to become advocates for archives and their benefits to communities.
Ensuring valuable digital information remains usable over time is a key challenge for archives, and it is vital this is addressed to ensure that the administration, accountability and transparency of organisations is maintained and enhanced. The quality of the services provided by public and other bodies could be equally affected if their information is not safeguarded for future use.

Digital assets can either be born digital, they can be digitised records where the physical record no longer survives, or they can be digital surrogates (a digital copy of the original item). Advice is available from a number of sources to ensure that practical, uncomplicated, inexpensive preservation can be undertaken within this framework. Partners such as the Digital Preservation Coalition support bodies in designing their digital preservation strategies, and with The National Archives, communicate good practice in making use of existing technology to address digital preservation needs.

The National Archives and the sector have been working together to develop and make available digital preservation tools; to provide expert and hands-on information advice, guidance and roadshows; to publish web archiving guidance and digital preservation principles; to pilot a web archiving scheme for local authorities to test how they can curate a collection of local sites; and to create the official government archive to preserve the record of the Olympic Games 2012.

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"Coordinated response to the growing challenges of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future"

— Third recommendation, Archives for the 21st Century
Digital by design: over the next three years

The National Archives will...

• Continue to innovate and develop solutions for the management and accessibility of digital records at scale
• Promote the contribution that digital continuity and preservation makes to wider organisational needs, strategies and goals
• Work with partners to make training, information and guidance available through The National Archives' web resources and to share good practice from across the sector
• Explore the potential for archiving websites using models adapted from the web archiving pilot.

And archives should...

• Ensure clear strategies are in place to enable the selection, management and preservation of digital records, in parallel to those for paper records
• Deliver better links between IT departments, record creators, record managers and archivists
• Explore the potential for archiving websites relevant to their other collecting activities
• Explore options for recruiting digital records specialists or sharing access to such expertise

Key partners

Digital Preservation Coalition
Ministry of Justice
Heritage Lottery Fund
Local Government Association
Information and Records Management Society
JISC
Digital Curation Centre
Society of Information Technology Management
Archives and Records Association
This partnership gave Hull a really useful insight into what others were doing and allowed for open exchange of information, that otherwise may not have been shared so freely

— Simon Wilson, Senior Archivist, Hull History Centre

case study

Digital by design: the AIMS project

The project appointed an archivist who works to disseminate the learning from the project through workshops, events and the project blog, and archivists involved in the project have produced guidance and good practice. While processing the collections, archive staff at Hull developed skills, knowledge and experience required for managing born-digital archives that is shaping the institution's policies and strategies for both handling the material and its relations with depositors. They also reviewed the practical and meaningful level of cataloguing needed to facilitate access, bearing in mind the sheer volume of born-digital material and the potential for the content of the born-digital to be searchable in its own right.

As well as sharing skills and experience, this project shows the benefits of collaboration, even when the principal outcome might be to develop a solution that is organisation-specific.
More accessible online

“Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them

— Fourth recommendation, Archives for the 21st Century

Digitisation is a huge area of opportunity for archives and the way that users engage with their services. Online access to digitised material and catalogues is transforming the way that researchers explore archives, and increasingly records which are not available or described online will be invisible to a generation which relies exclusively on the internet for the discovery of resources.

Identifying and digitising archival collections strategically is essential to meet the growing public expectations of access to resources and information, and to enable the unlocking the cultural and economic value of heritage. Archives are achieving this through digitisation on demand, or by working with groups of volunteers to catalogue and tag records. Through the digitisation consortium, partners offer support and advice on contracts and commercial proposals to help archives exploit the potential of digitisation.

The National Archives and the sector have been working together to pilot an England and Wales licensing consortium to open up the huge potential for commercial mass digitisation of archival resources; to award £0.9m cataloguing grants to about 20 projects; to undertake the Finding Archives review, exploring current use of the National Register of Archives, ARCHON and associated finding aids and how they might be developed in the future; to facilitate the annual UK Archives Discovery Forum to promote the opening-up of data; to publish guidance on collections development; and to fund projects to digitise the Manorial Documents Register for ten counties across England.
More accessible online: over the next three years

The National Archives will...

- Promote and facilitate the sharing of best practice and new ways of working to open up archives
- Complete the commercial digitisation consortium pilot project, with the Archives and Records Association
- Promote and encourage the collection and preservation of records from the point of creation
- Provide support and guidance on the amended European Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information, and ensure that any amendments to copyright law take account of online access to archival material
- Extend The National Archives’ new catalogue, Discovery to provide a single point of online access to catalogue and organisational data from across the archive sector
- Secure funding for an extension of the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme for a further five years
- Initiate work on every remaining English county in the Manorial Document Register within five years.

And archives should...

- Work with commercial partners and funding bodies to create opportunities for digital projects
- Explore the potential of philanthropic and academic partnerships to fund cataloguing projects based on priorities identified by partner organisations
- Explore ways to build infrastructure to enable the re-use and re-interpretation of online collections, and expose the information to the widest possible audience
- Complete the conversion of existing catalogues into electronic form within five years, so that archives can make all their catalogue data available online.

Key partners

Archives and Records Association
Arts Council England
Strategic Content Alliance
Heritage Lottery Fund
UK Archives Discovery Network (UKAD)
British Film Institute
Arts and Humanities Research Council
JISC
We hope this will be a great resource for enthusiasts, historians, architects and students alike. Now everyone can enjoy these amazing drawings and historical documents and learn more about how the railways made Britain what it is today.

— Vicky Stretch, Network Rail’s archivist

More accessible online: Network Rail Online Archive

Network Rail has recently launched its virtual archive to give public access to a special selection from the collection of over 5 million records they hold. These range from architectural drawings of the Forth Bridge and Paddington Station to images of Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s signature.

The online archive is designed thematically as a holistic resource combining articles, timelines and high-quality digital images of the rich range of visual map and plans within the collection. The archive aims to bring a commercial element, enabling users to buy a print of their favourite railway image or have it made into a range of items such as jigsaws and greeting cards.
Real outcomes through partnership

“Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community” — Fifth recommendation, Archives for the 21st Century

Community means a shared locality, interest or identity, and archives are perfectly positioned to reflect the multiple communities with which people identify. They play a fundamental part in these communities, from shaping the shared sense of national and local identities, to providing a stimulating environment for lifelong learning and scholarship.

Initiatives and projects with a national or global reach can connect archives services to each other, to other interest groups and to new audiences. Building partnerships at this level provides opportunities to contribute to wider national campaigns, and to develop links with the broader cultural sector and its audiences.

Increasingly, services need to be able to compete effectively for resources. Demonstrating how they engage with their communities, provide a formal and informal learning resource and ensure access to good-quality services will support and cement the place of archives within their organisational framework. Working in cultural and learning partnerships will strengthen archives’ contribution to the strategic aims of their parent organisations and help them provide good value.

The National Archives is helping archives achieve this by demonstrating good practice, and supporting the sector, its strategic partners and policy-makers to determine what works in order to make the case for the sector in future budget rounds.

The National Archives and the sector have been working together to support services in developing new models of service delivery; to deliver the strategic commissioning education programme; to create information, advice and guidance on engaging with communities; to promote engagement projects which promote active participation from community groups; to facilitate the Community Archives and Heritage Group.
Real outcomes through partnership: over the next three years

The National Archives will...

- Use existing data to explore existing methodologies to demonstrate the social, economic and educational impact of archives
- Collate and disseminate case studies on good-practice activities from across the sector
- Continue to showcase archive learning resources
- Ensure that best practice is applied to collections methodology
- Develop stronger relationships at national and regional level with government, other cultural organisations and funders

And archives should...

- Add value to tourism campaigns and explore the potential of cross-cultural partnerships
- Look for opportunities arising from changes to the National Curriculum
- Link to events with the potential to achieve wider impact, such as the First World War centenary commemorations and 800th anniversary of Magna Carta in 2015
- Participate in the Archives and Records Association’s high-profile national campaign (the successor to the Archives Awareness Campaign, currently under development).

Key partners

Arts Council England
Local Government Association
Archives and Records Association
Heritage Lottery Fund
English Heritage
Higher Education Funding Council for England
National Museum Directors’ Conference
British Film Industry
Renaissance core museums
“[Forty Years On] is conserving heritage for the future memories of the past which will provide future generations with a much more rounded picture of what has happened to Peterborough.”

— Anne Mason, Committee Member for the Heritage Lottery Fund East of England

Real outcomes through partnership:
Peterborough Archives Service: Forty Years On

From 2011, over two and a half years, Peterborough Archives Service has been engaged in an exciting form of community engagement and partnership working to explore, archive and creatively interpret their records. The project is being delivered through an imaginative partnership between Peterborough Archives and Eastern Angles, a theatre company.

Teams of volunteers are cataloguing the records of the Peterborough Development Corporation and recording oral history interviews with the citizens of the city caught up in the process of Peterborough’s recent regeneration. This material will then be passed on to Eastern Angles theatre group, who will put on two theatre productions in the city, first a documentary play and then a community play involving hundreds of community practitioners.